DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 757 EA 024 225

AUTHOR Guthrie, Larry F.; van Heusden Hale, Sylvie
TITLE Improvement Efforts for Low-Performing Schools.
INSTITUTION Far West Lab. for Educational Research and Development, San Francisco, Calif.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Sep 90
CONTRACT 400-86-0009
NOTE 25p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Improvement; *Educationally Disadvantaged; *Educational Opportunities; Effective Schools Research; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; *Excellence in Education; High Risk Students; School Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

The issues of excellence and equity in American education are examined in this paper, which also outlines the effective schools movement behind the competing goals of excellence and equity. The traditional approaches to educational change and the reasons why these approaches have been ineffective are summarized. This paper shows how the need to find a more effective approach to educational improvement has led the two factions--excellence and equity--to realize that in order to raise achievement for all students improvement at the school level, or whole-student improvement, must be addressed. Several innovative whole-school improvement efforts are described, which are classified into three categories: (1) networking programs, such as the National Network for Educational Renewal and Re: Learning; (2) demonstration programs, such as Accelerated Schools, Success for All, and the School Development Program; and (3) regional state department of education programs in Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. This paper serves as a starting point for thinking about educational change and the ways in which schools can be improved to more effectively serve the at-risk population. (Contains 29 references.) (Author/LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED348757

IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS FOR LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Larry F. Guthrie
Sylvie van Heusden Hale

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

September 1990

EA 024 225

FarWest LABORATORY

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS FOR LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Larry F. Guthrie
Sylvie van Heusden Hale

September 1990

This document was supported by funds from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement under Contract Number 400-86-0009 to Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Education.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the issues of excellence and equity in American education and outlines the effective schools movement behind the competing goals of excellence and equity. In doing so, the paper summarizes the traditional approaches to educational change and the reasons why these approaches have not been effective.

The paper points to how the need to find a more effective approach to educational improvement has led the two factions–excellence and equity–to realize that in order to raise achievement for all our students we have to address improvement at the school level, that is whole school improvement. To illustrate the efforts at whole school improvement, the authors review several innovative improvement efforts. School improvement programs are classified into three categories: (1) networking programs–The National Network for Educational Renewal and Re: Learning; (2) demonstration programs–Accelerated Schools, Success for All, and the School Development Program; and (3) regional state department of education programs in Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. This paper serves as a starting point for thinking about educational change and the ways in which we can improve our schools in order to more effectively serve the at-risk population.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Reform for Excellence 1

Equity and the Educationally Disadvantaged 2

The Traditional Approach 3
Dropout Prevention 4

A Consensus on Schoolwide Improvement 4

Improvement Efforts 5

Networking Programs 6
The National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) 6
Re: Learning 7

Demonstration Programs 7
Accelerated Schools 8
Success For All 8
The School Development Program 9

Regional State Department of Education Programs 11
Arizona 11
Arizona Pilot At-Risk Project 11
California 12
California Local Educational Reform Network (C-LERN) 12
Every Student Succeeds: Piloting Effective Programs and Services for Students At Risk 13
Nevada 13
The Six-Step Improvement Process 13
Nevada State Department of Education Support 14
Utah 14
Early Intervention for School Success Program 15

Conclusion 15

References 17

A tension between excellence and equity has long been an undeniable aspect of American education. On the one hand, we want schools that can produce the scientists, doctors, and other professionals that will make us competitive internationally. At the same time, schools are expected to ensure that all students, regardless of economic background, race, sex, or religious belief, will develop the academic and other skills necessary to be productive citizens. The concern for excellence reflects a concern for the larger group; equity, on the other hand, is intended to protect the interests of subgroups and individuals (Bacharach, 1990; Cuban, 1990). This tension between the competing goals of excellence and equity has most recently been played out in the reform movement that began the eighties.

Reform for Excellence

With the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), policymakers, educators, and the public turned their attention toward raising the educational achievement of America's children. Faced with the reported "rising tide of mediocrity," and threatened by international competition, our schools, states and districts began to tighten standards, lengthen school days, and impose more regulations and testing. A fledgling effective schools movement caught this wave and brought its own brand of school improvement into thousands of local schools and districts (Lezotte, 1986).

Whatever the intention of the members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, or the leaders of various school improvement efforts, most of the reforms of the early eighties focused on changes in state and local policies and regulations, rather than on how teaching and learning were carried out in our nation's classrooms. In order to tighten standards, states raised graduation requirements, set limits on sports and extra-curricular activities, designed career ladder programs for teachers, introduced competency testing, lengthened the school day, and even specified the number of announcements that might interrupt lessons. An estimated 700 statutes were introduced in the first two years following the issuance of the report (Timar & Kirp, 1989).

These regulations no doubt had an impact on schools overall. Students now attend school for longer periods of time and take more academic courses; textbooks have been upgraded; requirements for earning a high school degree are tougher; and teachers enjoy higher salaries and participate in mentor teacher programs. However, the reforms thus far appear to have had little effect on the shadow population of students who occupy the bottom rungs of the educational ladder. While student enrollment in advanced placement science courses has gone up, we haven't seen a reduction in the number taking remedial, low-level classes. Some changes, such as raised graduation requirements, for example, may

have actually forced some marginally successful students to leave school early, thus increasing dropout rates (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986).

A claim of the Effective Schools Movement is that their approach is designed to assist all the students in a school, and that the program addresses the needs of the educationally disadvantaged in particular. For the most part, however, these improvements appear to have had only an indirect effect on the educational attainment of at-risk students. A common criticism of the research on which the effective schools movement is based, for instance, is that it relied on aggregate student data almost exclusively and was restricted to standardized achievement tests (Good & Brophy, 1986; Purkey & Smith, 1983).

Equity and the Educationally Disadvantaged

At about the same time the school reform for excellence was hitting its stride, the conditions of education for disadvantaged and minority children once again caught the public's attention. Although they were a national concern of the Great Society years, low-achieving students and the poor were left out of the latest reform agenda. Then in the mid-eighties, a spate of reports publicized the limited educational opportunities and outcomes for as many as one-third of our nation's students and the abject conditions under which they receive their education in inner-city and poor rural schools (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1988; Committee for Economic Development, 1985 & 1987; Levin, 1986; National Governor's Association, 1986; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985; Youth and America's Future: The William T. Grant Foundation on Work, Family, and Citizenship, 1988).

A common theme in these reports has been that America can no longer afford to educate only a portion of its children. The time is long passed when the economy could absorb school dropout and undereducated graduates. Employment in 21st century America will require more than basic literacy and math skills. Workers will need to be able to solve problems, think creatively, and know how to learn. To ensure a capable and productive workforce, therefore, schools will have to find effective means for educating a larger proportion of our nation's children.

Another theme was that new and better educational programs designed for disadvantaged students would be required. The traditional school response to a diversity of student needs has been to try to meet each need individually through specialized programs targeted at particular groups of students. Thus we find schools populated with a jumble of special programs: Chapter 1 reading and math, English as a second language,

dropout prevention, pregnancy and parenting, special education, and substance abuse programs.

The Traditional Approach. As currently implemented, this traditional approach presents several problems. First, the special program often fails to respond adequately to the particular need it is supposed to address. Students who are falling behind academically, for example, are separated into small groups for short periods of time, where they are drilled on discrete skills. In most cases, they receive a slower-paced curriculum that provides only limited opportunities for developing advanced, "higher-order" skills and actually isolates them further from the regular program of study.

Instructional approaches in traditional lessons usually consist of teacher-directed instruction and seatwork, techniques that limit students' opportunities to exercise initiative in structuring academic tasks for themselves. This problem is compounded by the fact that the instructors are often classroom aides who lack the training, experience, and expertise of a regular classroom teacher.

Teachers and aides often demand less of disadvantaged students. Because they do not seriously expect the students to make up achievement differences, teachers tend to accept poorer performance from at-risk students and are satisfied with slower rates of progress. Lower expectations, along with a slower-paced curriculum, restricted instructional approaches, and unskilled instructors, combine to create a situation that makes it practically inevitable that students who start to fall behind will become permanent residents of a remedial track and eventually leave school altogether (L.F. Guthrie, 1989; Oakes, 1986).

A second problem with the traditional approach is that it provides at-risk students with a fragmented educational experience that is little more than a collection of disconnected lessons. As students are identified for one program after another, more special classes are added to their daily schedule. In the end, the relationship between the regular curriculum and supplementary classes is lost. In elementary schools, for example, classroom teachers often have little or no idea of what is happening in the other classes. In addition, the time allocated to each program usually isn't enough to make a significant impact on student learning or behavior (Rowan, L. F. Guthrie, Lee, & G.P. Guthrie, 1986). An extra half-hour of low-level worksheets is unlikely to affect student achievement in an appreciable way.

Third, because in many schools students only become eligible for special services when they slip into the lowest quartile on standardized tests, those who are having trouble receive no formal help until they are far behind their peers. At that point, the achievement gap and the students' damaged self-esteem create an extraordinary challenge for the school. For many students, it may already be too late.

Dropout Prevention. One arena in which these problems have been manifest is in dropout prevention. Over the past several years, reducing the nation's dropout rate has become a major concern of both educators and policy makers. A 10 percent dropout rate by the year 2000 ranks as one of President Bush's National Goals for Education.

When the magnitude of the dropout problem was recognized in the mid-1980s, the initial response at virtually all levels was to develop separate dropout prevention programs for those most at risk of dropping out. In keeping with the approach that targets particular needs, most dropout prevention programs followed one of two designs. The first strategy focused on improving students' self-esteem and sense of belonging. A common approach was to add counselors who would assume responsibility for the group of students most at risk, offering them guidance, support, and a friendly ear. Mentoring and work experience were also tried. Whatever the particular strategy, however, the goal was to convince students that teachers and other school personnel genuinely cared about them and their future. Responding to the alienation and anonymity that many at-risk students face, the program was intended to make students feel a part of the school.

The other design for dropout prevention was narrowly academic and intended to address the basic skill deficiencies of potential dropouts through remedial instruction. Alternative classes were substituted for the regular ones–English B instead of English A. The main problem with this approach, as suggested earlier, is that students who were far behind academically were given almost no chance of closing the gap. In addition, they were sent the clear message that school was not for them.

In neither of these approaches was the program integrated into the regular school program. Rather, dropout prevention activities were segregated from the mainstream. More importantly, few interventions were able to combine effectively the social and academic emphases of two approaches (L.F. Guthrie, G.P. Guthrie, & van Heusden, 1990; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez, 1989) or to find ways to incorporate programmatic strategies into schoolwide improvement.

A Consensus on Schoolwide Improvement

In the past few years, parallel developments among reformers striving for excellence on the one hand, and those seeking to improve the educational outcomes for students at risk on the other, have resulted in a growing consensus toward schoolwide improvement and restructuring. Both groups of educators have come to realize that raising the academic performance of all students, including those most at risk of school failure, can best be achieved when schools are treated as institutions, and when improvement efforts are directed at raising the quality of the whole school.

However much schools might have changed as a result of the reform movement, many agree that in fundamental ways, they remain much the same as before (National Governors' Association, 1987; Shanker, 1990). Thus, raising standards and requirements can only go so far; instead, radical changes in the way schools are organized must be considered. Although certain state and district policies (relaxed requirements, targeted funding) may represent necessary conditions for school change, in order to impact the way schools are run, more effective ways must be found to support local district and school interventions and change efforts.

Therefore, as the decade of the 1990s begins, we are witness to a convergence of opinion that both excellence and equity can be achieved if our schools are treated as the unit for change. Restructuring, shared decision-making, site-based management, school choice, and the professionalization of teaching have become an essential part of the jargon of school administrators and reformers nationwide. From the perspective of reformers, the "locus of action," as Kirst calls it (Kirst & McLaughlin, 1990), has moved down the bureaucratic hierarchy to the school. The feeling is that instead of legislators and state department officials, teachers, principals, and local district staff should decide on changes that need to be made. They should decide when and how schools should be restructured.

At the same time, those working to improve the educational outcomes for students at risk are shifting their focus up the hierarchy from the loose collections of educational programs that populate schools. They are beginning to recognize that piecemeal, narrowly focused programs for basic skills remediation and dropout prevention are largely ineffective. While individual programs can make a difference for students at risk–even a single class–a better education for ALL students will require more than add-on, piecemeal programs. Responsibility for their education cannot be left entirely up to the dropout prevention specialists, remedial teachers, or adjunct counselors; it must be shared by all adults in the school (L.F. Guthrie, 1990). Providing this type of schooling will mean improving the overall school program so that all children, especially those at risk of school failure, receive a high quality education.

Improvement Efforts

While there is still no shortage of purveyors of add-on programs or short-term interventions, a number of efforts are currently underway that concentrate on whole school improvement as a means for raising the achievement of students at risk. They are designed to develop and execute a shared vision in the school that all students can learn.

On a national level, networks of schools share strategies and work to implement similar changes. Through the Chapter 1 program, schools that are unable to show student achievement gains are required to develop program improvement plans and are held

accountable for outcomes. As part of the same program, the Department of Education is encouraging schools to experiment with "schoolwide projects" that permit the use of categorical funds for general upgrading of school programs. In addition, districts, universities and various private agencies are working to improve schools that serve at-risk populations. Most state departments of education have implemented a school improvement or restructuring program; various national and local groups have undertaken school reform activities; several university-sponsored projects are underway; and a few individual districts, such as San Diego, Rochester, and Miami are experimenting with reorganizing schools in ways that could benefit students at risk.

Some of the most promising of these are the networks pulled together by John Goodlad and Theodore Sizer and three demonstration programs, Accelerated Schools, School Development Program, and Success For All. In the following pages, we briefly describe these programs and illustrate state-level activities from four western states.

Networking Programs

Several national projects that involve schools and districts in a collaborative network for sharing information and conducting school improvement are also underway. John Goodlad and his colleagues at the University of Washington, for example, have formed the National Network for Educational Renewal and Theodore Sizer of Brown University has teamed up with the Education Commission of the States to form Re: Learning.

The National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER). This network is a coalition of school-university partnerships. Traditional models of school change often create adversarial relationships between "experts" who hand down innovations and educators who are seen as unable to identify and address schools' problems on their own. This in turn leads to a view that schools are objects to be changed rather than centers of change. The goal of the NNER partnerships is to improve schools and teacher education through symbiotic relationships where partners have equal status.

Partnerships consist of one or two universities linked with one to 14 school districts. The partners must work on at least one of the problems identified by Goodlad as critical to educational improvement (e.g., curriculum alignment, teacher preparation, equal access to schooling). Partnerships are financially self-sufficient and develop their own agenda based on local needs. Partnerships may create settings for teacher and principal training, develop new instructional approaches, and design plans for restructuring. "The basic aim, according to Mr. Goodlad, is to create a 'new paradigm' for the way change occurs, one based on 'self-renewal' at the school site, rather than mandates imposed from above" (Olson, L., 1987, p. 19).

Goodlad believes that administrative support is essential in order to sustain changes. Superintendents must be involved too. Without their support there could be resistance at the central district office level. Time is very important in this process as well. In order to give teachers more time to plan, coordinate, and develop curriculum, professors have sometimes substituted in teachers' classrooms.

Re: Learning. Another national network is Re: Learning, a collaborative project of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES). Re: Learning addresses restructuring and educational improvement at three levels: at the schools, at the districts and states, and nationally. ECS has been working primarily with policymakers, while CES staff deal directly with schools.

Re: Learning seeks to restructure the educational system so that all students reach higher levels of achievement (Education Commission of the States, 1989). To bring this about, schools establish a few simple goals, adopt new views of student learning and assessment, and then implement appropriate changes in school organization, curriculum, and instruction. As a first step, each school joins the Coalition and embrace its nine guiding principles.

The nine principles promote a philosophy that stresses depth rather than breadth, active learning, mastery instead of seat-time, and high expectations for all students. Low student-teacher ratios, with a maximum of 80 students per teacher, and time for planning and coordination, and higher teacher salaries are also emphasized. The school should create an environment based on trust.

These principles provide guidance to the Coalition schools, but each individual school must find its own approaches and strategies for making these principles work.

The districts and states involved in Re: Learning must work on changing educational policies in order to facilitate and foster the efforts of the CES schools. To this end, each Re: Learning state has a school coordinator who organizes workshops, coordinates activities, provides feedback, offers assistance in difficult matters, and represents the program to the public. At the national level Re: Learning fosters discussion and debate about educational change and school restructuring.

Over 120 schools in several states have joined the Coalition of Essential Schools and Re: Learning movement (Watkins, 1990). While no formal evaluation has been conducted yet, Re: Learning is planning a national study of its efforts.

Demonstration Programs

Some of the most prominent demonstration models of improving schools for high-risk students are Henry Levin's Accelerated Schools (Levin, 1986), Robert Slavin's Success

For All (Slavin, Madden & Karweit, 1989), and James Comer's School Development Program, also known as the "Comer Process."

Accelerated Schools. In Henry Levin's Accelerated Schools program (Levin, 1986; Levin, 1988), the goal is for all students in the school to achieve at or above grade-level by the end of sixth grade. The program focuses on school-based governance, pupil assessment, nutrition and health, a rich literature-based curriculum for all students, instructional strategies such as peer tutoring and cooperative learning, community resources, parent involvement, and extended day sessions.

In general, the accelerated schools stress high expectations and frequent monitoring of progress. They are guided by three basic principles. First, the school establishes a unity of purpose through which teachers, students, and parents agree on common goals. Second, the school site is empowered to make decisions. The key participants, including parents, decide about the direction of the educational program, rather than district or state officials. The third principle is to build on the strengths that all concerned may bring, students, teachers, parents and community.

Accelerated Schools first set up a steering committee comprised of teachers, aides, and the principal as an *ex officio* member. This committee in turn organizes task forces and committees designed to address the priority issues for the school. Working with the district, and drawing on a combination of available resources, the school develops an improvement plan (Levin, 1988).

The Accelerated Schools program began with two pilot schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. Currently found in 40 schools nationwide, the program is set to expand even farther, having recently been awarded a $1.45 million grant from the Chevron Corporation to expand to satellite centers in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, and New Orleans. In only three years, considerable progress has been made at the original pilot schools. In one school, in which the enrollment is 85 percent Hispanic and 15 percent Asian immigrant, sixth graders' math scores climbed from the 10th to 27th percentile on the California Assessment Program in only three years. Compared with similar schools statewide, the school moved from the 42nd to the 77th percentile in math and from the 10th to 60th percentile in writing (Stanford Educator, 1990).

Success for All. The guiding principle of the Success for All Program is that "all students can learn." To ensure that they do, major changes in the operation of the elementary school are necessary. All students will reach or maintain grade level by the end of the third grade, participating schools must adopt several research-based changes.

First, Success for All establishes a half-day preschool and extends kindergarten to a full day. Curriculum in both the preschool and kindergarten focuses on language skills, "academic readiness," music, and art. Second, a "Family Support Team" is formed. The

team is comprised of two social workers and a parent liaison. The team offers parenting education and fosters parental involvement in children's education. The team also provides support in the areas of health (e.g., nutrition), attendance, and behavior problems. A third element is a structured reading program. This program organizes groups of 15 students at the same reading level for 90 minutes of reading time each day. Reading tutors also work one-on-one with the students for 20-minute periods. The tutors also coordinate with the reading teachers and provide support during the 90-minute grouped sessions. Finally, student progress is closely monitored, and each has an "individual academic plan."

Success for All is designed for schools eligible for "schoolwide projects" under Chapter 1, the primary source of funding for the program. In order to administer and coordinate the program at the school level a Program Facilitator is chosen at each school. The facilitator plans with the principal, visits classes, works with children one-on-one to identify specific strategies to address unique difficulties, and acts as coordinator of instructional and the Family Support Team. Success for All also provides teacher training in areas such as class management, instructional strategies and reading curriculum. Finally, an advisory committee monitors school and program progress on a weekly basis. In the first two years of the program, Success for All students fared significantly better than comparison groups on several measures of reading readiness and reading comprehension.

The School Development Program. In 1968, two New Haven, Connecticut schools were chosen to participate in the Yale Child Study Center's School Development Program (SDP). As director of the program, James P. Comer organized a mental health team comprised of himself, a social worker, a teacher, and a psychologist. Together they began to address schoolwide problems and implemented an intervention strategy based on child development theories. After more than 20 years, the program has evolved into an integral part of the schools and district. Results have been impressive and have prompted the Rockefeller Foundation to spend several million dollars to disseminate the Comer model.

The underlying notion behind the School Development Program is that differences in background and values between home and school create conflict in the social and intellectual development of the child. Parents and teachers need to work toward similar objectives and create compatible environments for children.

Comer remarked that before World War II, educators were members of the same community as the parents and students. Teachers and parents used to interact to help create a supportive learning environment. They reinforced one another. But as economic and social structures changed so did the role of the teacher in the community. Comer

argues that trusting relationships must be reestablished in order to foster a positive school climate and improve student achievement.

The Comer model is comprised of four main components: First is a mental health team made up of a social worker, a psychologist, and a special education teacher. Together the team works on individual student cases or reviews the activities of other groups formed to ensure the healthy development of student social and academic skills. The team also provides training on child development issues.

Second is a governance and management group. This group includes the principal, a member of the mental health team, a teacher, and selected parents. The group meets regularly to plan strategies, gather resources, and implement interventions. They also meet to set policies, plan annual social events and staff development activities.

The third component of the Comer model is the parent program. Parents are encouraged to become involved at any of three levels: as part-time aids in the classroom where they help teachers plan extracurricular activities; as members of the governance group; or as participants in schoolwide academic and social events.

The final component of the model is the curriculum and staff development program. This program ensures integration and coordination of academic, social, and extracurricular activities into a comprehensive schoolwide curriculum. It also supports teachers in developing curricula for their particular students and organizes workshops for teachers and parents. Through this program teachers are trained to understand the psychological development of children and how a disadvantaged background entails developing alternative instructional patterns.

The results of the New Haven experiment have been impressive. After five years behavioral problems had declined sharply, relations between parents and teachers had improved, and students exhibited significant academic gains. Once the two New Haven schools ranked lowest on achievement tests of 33 elementary schools. Students were 18 to 19 months behind academically. By 1979, the two schools ranked third and fourth on basic skills tests.

The Comer model has been shown to have lasting effects. Students who participated in the original program were tested three years after leaving the schools. They scored better than a control group on all basic skills tests. They also performed at or above grade level in mathematics and language skills, as compared to one to two grades behind for the control group.

Parents were also shown to have gained from the School Development Program. Some have gone back to school to complete their high school education, others have gone on to college.

Regional State Department of Education Programs

Each of the four states in the Western Region, Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah, is actively pursuing school improvement activities with a special focus on students at risk.

Arizona

Arizona Pilot At-Risk Project. The Arizona Pilot At-Risk Project, a 4-year pilot project initiated by legislation in 1988, focuses on two segments of the at-risk population: students in kindergarten through third grade (K-3) and youth in grades seven through twelve (7-12). Initial funds appropriated to the project amounted to $4.5 million and an additional $3.2 million were appropriated in 1989. The legislation also established criteria for implementation of pilot projects in individual districts. For K-3 funding, indicators such as absenteeism, socioeconomic status, limited-English proficiency, and low test scores were used to identify 80 eligible districts. All districts could compete for the 7-12 funds, but ratings of districts' "at-riskness" and the quality of their proposed program determined those selected for funding. Beginning with a total of 33 district projects in 1988, the program had increased to 42 elementary and 13 secondary pilot projects by 1990. In a move toward school site program management, seven of these projects are individual schools representing pockets of poverty within larger districts.

The legislation required that the participating K-3 districts focus on "academic assistance and parental involvement." To this end, efforts within the K-3 pilot projects have included: revised or enhanced curriculum and instructional strategies; staff development; add-on programs like summer school, after-school programs, full-day kindergarten, and tutorials; restructured classroom management; school-parent-community relations; and adult education.

For the participating 7-12 districts the law required a focus on "academic, vocational, and support services." Some of the districts are providing services to groups of students identified as highly at-risk, while others are providing services for all students. Some elements of the 7-12 pilot projects include: academic and instructional support (e.g., tutoring and computer assisted learning); summer and alternative school; counseling; career awareness and work programs; staff development; and parental and community involvement.

As a result of the legislation many programs have been developed and put into practice at the district and school levels. Among the accomplishments thus far are improved student self-esteem and achievement (as perceived by teachers), increased parental involvement, the retrieval of students who had either physically or psychologically left the system, and raised concern among school personnel for at-risk students. Although

restructuring of school programs has been initiated in some districts, schoolwide change efforts have not yet resulted as part of the project. The state is encouraging districts to move further in this direction through technical assistance provided by the State Department of Education. While much has been accomplished already, the At-Risk Pilot Project represents only an initial effort in a much needed larger reform effort, one in which an integrated school/home/community/social service system is developed.

California

The California Department of Education (CDE) sponsors a number of programs for school improvement and at-risk students. Two of these are particularly relevant. One such program, in its third year of operation, is the California Local Educational Reform Network (C-LERN). The second, Every Student Succeeds, is scheduled to begin pilot projects in Fall 1991.

California Local Educational Reform Network (C-LERN). C-LERN is a school improvement process particularly intended for schools with high concentrations of students at risk. The C-LERN process is based on the premises that all children can learn, all teachers can teach, and the school site is the point at which meaningful change will take place. With district or CDE guidance, school staffs are empowered to identify and address specific barriers to success. A school site leadership team coordinates an improvement process that capitalizes on the unique strengths and creativity of the staff and communities.

C-LERN schools develop a mission statement, establish a site leadership team, commit teacher time to the process, provide staff development to those involved, and foster parent involvement. The district superintendent and the school board must be committed to change, supportive of a site-based management approach, and willing to redirect funds for the project. As of January 1990, 21 districts and 91 schools were involved in C-LERN.

C-LERN covers three cycles over a five-year period. Cycle One (Year One) consists of four phases–Orientation, Diagnosis, Prescription, and Intervention. Cycle Two (Year Two) follows with the Evaluation and the Adjustment and Implementation phases. Cycle Three (Years Three to Five) is the Institutionalization/Replication phase during which schools recycle the change process with reduced assistance from C-LERN (California State Department of Education, 1988). C-LERN offers annual Summer Institutes and Academies where site leadership teams are introduced to the process and develop and update school intervention plans. In addition, they learn about other intervention strategies, receive technical assistance, develop leadership skills, and establish a network.

Every Student Succeeds: Piloting Effective Programs and Services for Students At Risk. A joint effort of special education, compensatory education, C-LERN, and other specialized state programs, the Every Student Succeeds Project will be piloted in five to 10 districts around the state (California Department of Education, 1990). Working as partners, the state and participating districts will design, implement, and improve programs and schools for students at risk over a three- to five-year period. Up to 10 schools in each district will serve as demonstration sites. The initiative aims to identify strategies which successfully address the problems of at-risk youth and develop models that can be replicated in the other districts throughout the state.

The guiding principles of the initiative are: to create coordinated and comprehensive educational programs and services for all students; to focus on curricular and instructional improvements and innovations; to identify effective practices for students at risk; to develop a comprehensive approach to all students (e.g., home-school-community linkages); to integrate prevention into the regular school structure; and to establish effective staff development.

Participating schools and districts will receive technical assistance and waivers of compliance from the state education agency. A key component of the training and technical assistance will be a set of implementation handbooks that will provide schools with an array of options, models and staff development alternatives. In addition, a larger group of schools will be linked electronically to facilitate information-sharing among the demonstration sites and others.

Nevada

In 1985, the Nevada State Department of Education (NSDE) initiated a reform effort called the **School Improvement Project** (SIP). SIP is a voluntary improvement program that leads schools through a six-step improvement process with NSDE support and feedback. The guiding philosophy of SIP is based on the five correlates of school improvement outlined in Ron Edmonds' research and a sixth, ***home-school relations***, that ensures parent and community involvement in the educational process, added by NSDE. The correlates serve as a guide as schools go through the improvement process.

The Six-Step Improvement Process. The first step is to secure the support of the school principal, the district superintendent, and at least 50 percent of the staff. The school forms a school improvement team, comprised of the principal and three to nine teachers who identify local needs through a self-assessment (the second step of the process) and guide the school in the improvement process.

Self-assessment, the second step, consists of several parts. Staff and students are surveyed to determine areas of needed improvement. Then the school improvement team

conducts a document inventory in which all school policy manuals, newsletters, grievance forms, student handbooks, and other documents are reviewed for currency, use, and relevance to school goals. Next, they administer a Supplemental Student Questionnaire which gathers information on students' socioeconomic status, educational history, and activities outside of school. Finally, the team monitors the progress of the improvement program using specially designed forms that outline tasks and completion dates.

The third step of the SIP process is to develop a mission statement that reflects input from teachers, parents, students, and staff. This statement is disseminated and annually reviewed.

In the fourth and fifth steps, the school improvement team guides the school staff in forming subcommittees for identified goals. The subcommittees then design strategies for improvements (Step Five). The NSDE helps the subcommittees implement the changes, set timelines and evaluation criteria. The sixth step is a reevaluation that monitors change and identifies successes.

Nevada State Department of Education Support (NSDE). The NSDE provides technical assistance and serves as facilitator for the process. It trains school teams in the use of assessment tools and in the design and implementation of improvement strategies. It also provides technical assistance on an on-going basis. Although the NSDE offers no additional funds as part of SIP, it helps schools focus their attention on specific well-defined problems and invest money, energy and time into solving those problems. Additional support is made available for substitute teachers while regular teachers attend meetings and plan improvement activities. According to the State Program Coordinator, SIP is intended to help schools help themselves.

As of the 1990-91 school year, 81 schools were become part of the Nevada School Improvement Project. Selected through a nomination process, all but one district in the state is represented in the project.

Utah

In 1988, the Utah State Office of Education organized a taskforce to develop a Utah Master Plan for Students At Risk. Responding to a mandate from the State Board of Education, of staff from the State Office formed a broad-based committee representing large and small school districts, the Governor's Office, Department of Health, Parent Teacher Association, universities, Juvenile Justice, and the Office of Rehabilitation. The chief aim of the Master Plan was to provide a structure for change that would foster the development of a suitable and relevant educational system for all students. Several problems of education in Utah, including a lack of early intervention services for all students; uneven availability and implementation of programs; lack of coordination of

services to students and families; unclear role definition of service agencies, families, and other community members; no established definition and method of counting dropout definition; and inadequate staffing and funding.

The Master Plan offers strategies for addressing the problems that include seeking and sharing of information; developing task forces; building mechanisms for involving parents and communities; coordinating agencies on both programmatic and fiscal levels; and providing inservice training. Since its publication, the Master Plan has served as the basis for program improvement activities and legislation directed at students at risk within the state.

Early Intervention for School Success Program. An example of a project that was influenced by the Master Plan is the Early Intervention for School Success Program. The state legislature mandated that three agencies–Health, Social Services, and Education–each contribute $100,000 to a grant program that would fund individual school improvement projects. It is the intention of the Utah State Office of Education to study the process, progress, and outcomes of these school-level projects to determine which strategies are most effective for school improvement. The goal is replication to other schools. Another purpose of the program is to promote local empowerment and school-based management.

Districts and/or schools are free to design and propose own projects, with selection to be determined by whether the project is based on the Utah Master Plan, addresses the issues outlined by the legislation, includes health and social services, and cost.

Seven proposals were funded in 1989. The amounts given to each school and the types of projects developed are quite different, and no two proposals were the same. Some schools emphasized health or social issues, others emphasized student achievement.

The first year of the program has just ended and the first round of data have been collected, but not yet analyzed. Final results are not yet available, but there are indications that significant progress is being made in the participating schools.

CONCLUSION

Despite the growing interest and activity in improving educational outcomes for all students, large numbers of schools remain mired in the ineffectual procedures of the past. California Schools Superintendent Honig estimates that as many as one-third of the state's schools are still failing to perform adequately. Why? What are the critical features of interventions that make a difference? How can the state department of education, a district, or any other concerned agency help to turn around low-performing schools? If that were known, then not only SDE-sponsored programs, but others as well, could adopt

those strategies, and a new corps of "change agents" could be identified and trained to carry out the effort.

To a certain extent, the change efforts reviewed here share common strategies: decentralized decision-making, access to a rich curriculum for all students, raised expectations, coordination of categorical programs, focused staff development, mechanisms for providing extra quality instructional time, and increased involvement of parents and community (L.F. Guthrie, 1989; L.F. Guthrie, G.P. Guthrie & van Heusden, 1990; L.F. Guthrie, Long, & G.P. Guthrie, 1989). In other words, there is some agreement over WHAT to do. What remains, is the question of HOW to get schools to do it. We need to know more about the effectiveness of the strategies intervention programs employ: Staff training, technical assistance, establishment of site leadership teams, networking, project evaluation and monitoring, and on-site assistance. How does a school improvement team identify intervention strategies or other innovations and then build consensus?

We need to identify intervention strategies that really make a difference in school functions and student performance. We need to look at schools that are organized to serve all students, especially the most at-risk; provide students with access to a challenging curriculum; offer a coordinated program of study; involve parents in more than perfunctory ways; and allow decisions about organization, curriculum, and instruction to reside with the key staff involved. Once these schools are identified, we need to examine systematically the features of their programs, asking which make a difference and which are successful under what circumstances. In this way, we can effectively continue the merger of excellence and equity.

REFERENCES

Bacharach, S.B. (1990). *Education reform: Making sense of it all.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (1988). *An imperiled generation: Saving urban schools.* Princeton, NJ: Author.

Committee for Economic Development. (1987). *Children in need: Investment strategies for the educationally disadvantaged.* New York: Author.

Cuban, L. (1990). Cycles of history: Equity versus excellence. In S.B. Bacharach (Ed.), *Education reform: Making sense of it all* (pp. 135-140). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Education Commission of the States. (1989). *Changing systems: The three-year plan of the Education Commission of the States 1989-92.* Denver: Author.

Good, T.L., & Brophy, J.E. (1986). School effects. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed), *Handbook of research on teaching.* New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Guthrie, L.F. (1989). *What schools can do for students at risk.* San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Guthrie, L.F., Guthrie, G.P., & van Heusden, S. (1990). *Providing options for at-risk youth: The Health and Media Academies in Oakland* [Final report]. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Guthrie, L.F., Long, C., Guthrie, G.P. (1989). *Strategies for dropout prevention.* San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Kirst, M.W., & McLaughlin, M. (1989). *Rethinking children's policy: Implications for educational administration.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University, Center for Educational Research.

Levin, H.M. (1988). *Accelerated schools for at-risk students.* New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Policy Research in Education (CEPRE).

Levin, H.M. (1986, September). *The educationally disadvantaged are still among us.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University.

Lezotte, L.W. (1986, April). *School effectiveness: Reflections and future directions.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

McDill, E.L., & Natriello, G., & Pallas, A.M. (1986). A population at risk: Potential consequences of tougher school standards for student dropouts. In G. Natriello (Ed.), *School dropouts: Patterns and policies* (pp. 106-147). New York: Teachers College Press.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

National Governors' Association. (1986). *Time for results: The Governors' 1991 report on education*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

Oakes, J. (1986). *Keeping track*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Olson, L. (1987, March 18). Network for renewal: Goodlad seeks stronger school-university alliances. *Education Week*, pp. 1, 18-20.

Powell, A.G., Farrar, E., & Cohen, D.K. (1985). *The shopping mall high school: Winners and losers in the educational marketplace*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Purkey, S.C., & Smith, M.S. (1983). Effective schools: A review. *The Elementary School Journal*, *83*(4), 427-452.

Rowan, B., & Guthrie, L.F. (1989). The quality of Chapter 1 instruction: Results from a study of 24 schools. In R.E. Slavin, N.L. Karweit, & N.A. Madden (Eds.), *Effective programs for students at risk* (pp. 195-219). New York: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

Rowan, B., Guthrie, L.F., Lee, G.V., & Guthrie, G.P. (1986). *The design and implementation of Chapter 1 instructional services: A study of 24 schools* [Final report]. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Slavin, R.E., Karweit, N.L., & Madden, N.A. (1989). *Effective programs for students at risk*. New York: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

Slavin, R.E., Madden, N.A., & Karweit, N.L. (1989). Effective programs for students at risk: Conclusions for practice and policy. In R.E. Slavin, N.L. Karweit, & N.A. Madden (Eds.), *Effective programs for students at risk* (pp. 355-372). New York: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

Staff. (1990, Spring/Summer). Accelerated schools awarded $1.45 million from Chevron. *Stanford Educator*, pp. 1, 6-8.

Timar, T.B., & Kirp, D.L. (1989, March). Education reform in the 1980s: Lessons from the states. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *70*, 504-511.

Watkins, B.T. (1990, November 7). An education professor tries to put his 'fantasy school' into effect. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. A3.

Wehlage, G.G., Rutter, R.A., Smith, G.A., Lesko, N., & Fernandez, R.R. (1989). *Reducing the risk: Schools as communities of support*. Philadelphia: The Falmer Press.

Youth and America's Future: The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship. (1988). *The forgotten half: Non-college youth in America*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

STUDENTS AT RISK PROGRAM

Far West Laboratory for
Educational Research and Development

The Students At Risk Program at Far West Laboratory is one of four field services programs designed to serve the region comprised of Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. The program focuses on improving the educational opportunities of students who are least likely to attain their full educational potential.

School districts, universities, state departments of education, and other agencies use our resources, technical assistance, and reports to improve and extend existing programs or to design and initiate new ones. Current research and development activities address issues such as the organization of schools for students at risk, the setup and delivery of programs for potential dropouts, involvement of the private sector in education and the coordination of special services for low achieving students.

The Students At Risk Program maintains a Regional Resource Center which monitors regional needs and resources, disseminates information and products, makes referrals to other agencies, and provides technical assistance. With a collection of over 600 reports and documents, the Center provides summaries of recent reports and research; identifies and disseminates information on promising approaches and programs for high-risk students; acts as a broker between agencies in the region and nationally; and provides technical assistance on program development and evaluation.

The Students At Risk Program also coordinates the work of the National Network of Regional Educational Laboratories on the theme *Kids at Risk*. As part of this collaboration, the laboratories exchange information on products and programs and co-sponsor conferences. This work enhances the efforts of all the laboratories to provide services for at-risk students in their respective regions.

For more information, call or write:

Dr. Larry F. Guthrie, Director
Students At Risk Program
Far West Laboratory for
Educational Research and Development
730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
(415) 565-3010